Nakamaru's Well-Known Residents

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Watt and Sunny Nakamaru were well-known Fairbury residents from the 1960s through the 1980s. Watt had a unique profession as a chicken sexer. Watt was also a photographer. Sunny was well known because of her work at the Fairbury Hospital.

The story of this family began with the birth of Wataru "Watt" Nakamaru in 1923 in Fresno, California. His parents were Yasaburo Nakamaru and Chika Takami (1898-1932). His parents were born in Japan and emigrated to the United States. Shortly after Watt was born in California, his family returned to Japan. Watt grew up in Japan.

In 1925, Mioko "Sunny" Mikasa was born in Moneta, California. Her parents were Nikichi Mikasa (1886-1942) and Mase Imoto Mikas (1880-1980). Both of her parents were born in Japan, and they emigrated to America.

In the 1930 Census, four-year-old Sunny Mikasa lived with her family in Newport Beach, California. Her father's occupation was a farmer. A total of five children lived in the household.

Fourteen-year-old Watt Nakamaru left Japan in 1937 to live again in America. In the 1940 Census, Watt listed his occupation as a Los Angeles houseboy for the John and Ruth McCandless family, including nine-month-old Keith McCandless.

In the 1940 Census, Sunny Mikasa was 14 years old and living with her family in Dinuba, California. She listed her occupation as a farm worker.

On December 7, 1941, Japan bombed Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. This event marked the start of World War II for America. The United States was entirely caught off guard by the Pearl Harbor bombing.

Many Americans experienced panic, and they were very concerned Japan would launch a land invasion of the United States. Just a few months after the attack on Pearl Harbor, President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued Executive Orders to send all Americans of Japanese descent to Internment Camps. This Executive Order impacted at least 125,000 people, most of whom lived on the West Coast. Approximately two-thirds of the inmates were United States citizens. This massive group of people was sent to 75 different incarceration sites.

Nineteen-year-old Watt Nakamaru was sent to the Manzanar Japanese internment camp in California, which opened in March 1942. Seventeen-year-old Sunny Mikasa was sent to the Poston Relocation Center in California, which opened in May 1942. Sunny finished high school while she was held in the camp.

In December of 1944, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that it was unconstitutional to hold American citizens against their will. The internment camps were immediately shut down, and the inmates were allowed to return to their homes. Most of the people in the camps were held for about two and a half years in these camps.

There was a massive shortage of nurses during World War II. Before her release from the internment camp, Sunny Mikasa attended the St. Mary's Hospital Training School for Nurses in Quincy, Illinois. In November of 1944, Sunny was issued a United States Cadet Nurse Corps Membership card.

Around 1949, Watt Nakamaru attended an eight-month training program in Lansdale, Pennsylvania. In a 1982 Pantagraph article, Watt recounted that chicken sexing originated in Japan in the 1940s. He said the occupation seemed to be a specialty of Orientals because some Koreans could also perform this job. The job of a chicken sexer is to determine the sex of the chickens when they are babies since the female of the species is more important than the male to egg producers. In the 1982 interview, Watt reported that he could sort 1,000 to 1,200 chickens per hour with a 99 percent accuracy.

In 1949, Watt Nakamaru and Sunny Mikasa were married. They eventually had three children. In the 1950 Census, the Nakamaru family lived in Winona Lake, Indiana. Twenty-four-year-old Sunny listed her occupation as a registered nurse. Twenty-six-year-old Watt Nakamaru listed his occupation as a chicken separator for the American Cutting Company.

The 1959 Pantagraph published an article reporting that chicken sexers were very busy at the Honegger Farms in Forrest, Illinois. Honeggers employed two men to determine the sex of day-old chicks. It was reported that less than 1,000 persons in the United States were qualified to sort chicks at a high rate with 99 percent accuracy. Honeggers was considering hiring a third person to sort chicks because they were hatching anywhere from 25,000 to 160,000 chicks weekly. The article included a photo of Watt Nakamaru sorting chicks at the Forrest facility.

Also, around 1959, Watt Nakamaru started his photography hobby by taking photos of family and friends. He also experimented with video recording and took videos of the Fairbury swimming pool, the Forest Hatchery, the Indian Creek Golf Course, and the Homecoming Parade. These circa 1959 videos have been preserved and can be viewed from the Fairbury Echoes Museum website.

In 1974, the Daily Leader reported that Watt was opening a new business at his Fairbury home, Watt's Photo Service. Watt planned on taking professional photographs of engagements, weddings, anniversaries, and family portraits.

Sunny Nakamura worked at the Fairbury Hospital and eventually became the Director of Nursing. Both Watt and Sunny Nakamaru loved playing golf at the Indian Creek Golf Course.

Watt and Sunny Nakamaru retired to Lakeland, Florida. Both Watt and Sunny played in many golf tournaments in Florida. Watt Nakamaru died in 2008 at the age of 85, and Sunny Nakamaru passed away in 2016 at the age of 91. Watt and Sunny Nakamaru were an essential part of the Fairbury community for several decades.

In 1988, President Ronald Reagan signed the Civil Liberties Act of 1988. This act provided financial redress of $20,000 for each former detainee of the WWII internment camps who was still alive when the act was passed, totaling $1.2 billion.

On December 7, 1991, on the 50th anniversary of the Pearl Harbor attack, President George H. Bush issued a formal apology from the U.S. government to all people who were detained in the WWII internment camps. President Bush said the internment of Americans of Japanese ancestry was a great injustice, and it will never be repeated. By 1998, over 81,800 people qualified for the payments, and $1.6 billion was distributed among them.

Miyoko Mikasa (Sunny Nakamaru) in her U.S. Cadet Nurse Corps uniform.

Watt Nakamaru sexing chickens at Honeggers in the early 1960s.